

Voters apt to OK tax for arts if small

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The most intriguing survey result I've seen lately is this:

"Not only do self-identified nonvoters participate less in **cultural** activities, the children in their households are notably less likely to be involved in every one of the art-related activities specified in the questionnaire. Children of voters are nearly twice as likely to play music, write, dance, act or produce art than children in homes of nonvoters.

"Voters are twice as likely to support the arts as nonvoters."

Those were among the "key findings" in a recent telephone survey of 500 San Antonians. Galloway Research Service conducted the survey for the city Office of **Cultural** Affairs. I find the art-voting link fascinating because it confirms my view that arts involvement, as a creator or a consumer, has a strong civic component. Through the arts, we communicate our shared or competing values, beliefs, concerns and aspirations, engage our fellow citizens in conversation and strengthen the bonds of community. A healthy creative life helps build a healthy body politic.

But the Office of **Cultural** Affairs had a more mundane reason for wanting to know about people's voting habits.

The newly minted **cultural** plan, dubbed "The **Cultural Collaborative**," recommends asking voters to approve "a new, dedicated tax-based revenue stream for arts and culture ..."
The survey measured support for additional taxes up to \$25 a year. At the lower levels of taxation, the results were highly promising:

"At levels of \$10 and \$5 in additional taxes per year, respondents who strongly favor an initiative outnumber those strongly against it by 3 to 1. Two out of three respondents (66 percent) indicated strong support (ratings of 6 or 7) for an initiative to generate tax revenue for art support if it meant they would spend an additional \$5 per year in taxes."

The questionnaire didn't specify per-capita or per-household, but even \$5 per household would bring in an extra \$2 million a year, based on the 2000 census. Added to the **cultural** office's current \$3.3 million budget for grants and administration, that new money would raise San Antonio's per-capita arts funding from the catacombs to the dimly lighted cellar, slightly ahead of Houston but far behind Dallas and Austin.

What tax source would San Antonians prefer? They say no to the property tax, and the sales tax draws as much opposition as support. But:

"Respondents who strongly support using hotel room taxes out-numbered those opposed by more than 3 to 1 (50 percent to 14 percent) and those who strongly agreed with using an entertainment tax (42 percent) outnumber those against it (22 percent) by nearly 2 to 1."

The **cultural** office also wanted to gauge public support for new performing arts facilities. The survey found 40 percent strongly agreed that "San Antonio needs a major theater or concert hall to provide for additional performing arts for the public."

Interestingly, "Among various sub groups, Hispanics, those with a high school education or less and those with incomes under \$35,000 were more likely to strongly agree with the statement,

while Anglos were almost twice as likely to strongly disagree as African Americans or Hispanics." Assuming the survey results don't overstate the actual support for a tax initiative and new facilities, how might these new resources be deployed best?

I'll have some thoughts on that question next Sunday.

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